

Lancaster, Erie Co., N.Y.
Feb. 23, 1864

Gentlemen,

Seeing your request in the paper for communications from the old settlers of this vicinity, I desire to contribute a very brief one to say, that

I moved into the town, which now goes by the name of Lancaster, in the year 1808. At that time, as I will remember, there were but twelve dwelling houses, on the road through this region, between Buffalo & the eastern boundary of the county. I could tire your patience in reciting incidents of the war that soon after broke out between this country & Great Britain. This, however, I will not do, presuming that the object of my communication will be gained if I simply mention a few points that stand out vividly in my memory.

I was at Lewiston when the army of General Hull, after his shameful surrender at Detroit, was marched through Queenston as prisoners. I was among the men who served for three months, & were stationed at this point, being myself a drummer boy in the militia company of Capt. Asa P. Harris. And, indeed, I served subsequently, reporting myself for duty several times when an alarm was given. I was present when General Smythe essayed to cross into Canada with 4000 men, but after keeping the men for long hours graining upon the start, gave orders to abandon the undertaking – a piece of generalship whose reasons at the present time are pretty well understood. I was in this city the day, or the next day, after the British had left it a smouldering heap of ruins; & well do I remember the horrid spectacle, on Seneca Street, near Reese's blacksmith shop, of twenty corpses of our citizens lying together, each of which had been scalped by the Indians, & all of which were rigid with frost. When Fort Erie was blown up, I was in the town, & the next day helped carry to Williamsville 80 of the wounded British who had been brought across, but for whom there was no accommodations short of that village. Let me mention also that I witnessed, with crowds of others, the landing at this place of the noble Lafayette, coming down from Dunkirk. I was a passenger on board the old Walk-in-the-Water – the first steamer that ever plied on these lakes – when she finally stranded. I witnessed the launch of the steamer Daniel Webster, & listened to the speech that was made on the occasion by the great statesman after whom she was named. When the three Thayers were tried for murder, I was on the jury. But I must close this desultory letter; & perhaps cannot do so better than by saying, I have watched this city through all the stages of its growth, & can trace them back distinctly, even to the time when I used to husk corn upon the flats on the other side of the canal, when the present harbor was so shallow with accumulated sand, that one might wade across it, & when we used to reach Black Rock by following the line of the beach.

Truly Yours,

James Clark

Enclosed I send you my photograph